Teaching and Learning the Language Arts with Cooperative Learning Methods

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Educators, who have been given the herculean task of teaching communication skills, constantly seek more efficient ways of bringing learning and literacy to their pupils. Applying the philosophy and methods of cooperative learning to the instruction of the language arts is one suitable means for meeting that need.

Our intention is to suggest practical and useful ways of integrating literacy learning with cooperative methods. Our focus is on the employment of the collaborative approach as a valuable instructional procedure to promote literacy learning. It is hoped that teachers will not only grasp the specific techniques mentioned but will also adapt the suggestions to other language activities as well as to other subject areas, where applicable.

LITERACY AND COMMUNICATION

One of the most important areas of study, which crosses all boundaries of subject matter, is the acquisition and use of language arts skills and strategies, in other words, becoming literate. These skills and strategies involve the "ownership" of communication processes such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities, which are necessary for success in academic achievement as well as in everyday, real-life situations. Thus helping children to emerge, develop, and become literate is, and should be, one of the major goals of all school systems. "Our schools must mold and direct learners to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEPI, 1985).

COOPERATIVE METHODS AND LITERACY

A review of the research in cooperative learning pedagogy reflects the following positive elements: an on-task approach, shown to produce higher pupil achievement; greater use of higher-level reasoning; increased intrinsic motivation; and increased content retention by learners. Students learn with higher motivation and develop better attitudes toward themselves, their teachers, their peers, and the school. Thus cooperative learning generates better development as well as stronger and healthier relationships. These findings have motivated greater use and implementation of collaborative methods in the classroom. Slavin (1990) noted that "the uses of cooperative learning methods have mushroomed in recent years at all levels of schooling."

We would like to suggest that instructional environments for developing literacy should be built around cooperative and collaborative activities since these activities best approximate real-life communicative situations. By introducing cooperative methods, we are likely to better prepare our learners for literate functioning inside and outside school. To optimize success in learning language arts, it would be judicious to combine all of the elements of the language arts with collaborative learning.

METHODS AND APPROACHES: NATURAL TRENDS

Literacy educators are becoming aware of newer trends in pedagogy where natural, relevant, and functional learning is required. These "natural" trends, such as Whole Language, call for a different teaching/learning approach. In Whole Language, the teacher must not only prepare the classroom with real-life, authentic, learning materials and offer a variety of reading and writing activities that give the student a wealth of literacy learning possibilities, he or she must also introduce cooperative learning modes. Goodman and Goodman (1982) felt that the "natural" learning setting gives the learner meaningful, integrated reading and writing experiences.

In contrast, the traditional basal-reader approach, with a highly structured scope and sequence of skills, doe' not reflect the objectives of real- life communication. In the "natural" context, children have to form their own rules about language as they use language. Instead of talking about reading and writing, the children actually read and write.

Learning is made more authentic and efficient through the use of various group structures. The flexibility and social interactions of the cooperative learning/teaching mode offer the Whole Language teacher more opportunities for natural and successful learning situations. They also give the pupils more time to read and write, to share that work, and to build and expand their literacy knowledge base. Philosophically, Whole Language offers the closest literacy methodology to cooperative work. Learning in the classroom mirrors learning outside the class. It becomes functional, relevant, and, most important, meaningful, and the children learn how to "mean." Watson and Crowley (1988) noted that in "whole language... students become aware by discussing and reflecting on the strategies involved in real reading instead of drilling on skills."

Good reading behavior includes elements of risk taking: educated predicting, speculating, developing hypotheses, and guessing the meaning. In a traditional reading program, the children do not take many "natural" risks, since time and frontal presentations do not encourage risk taking. Yet risk taking is an essential element in literacy growth and is possible and more conceivable in a cooperative mode. The atmosphere, the wide range of possible activities, the flexibility, the sense of satisfaction, the social interaction, the openness and peer acceptance, all the elements of cooperative learning, offer strong scaffolding for risk taking.

In a cooperative class, learning is built on the literacy base pupils bring with them to the learning situation. The opportunity for asking questions and for finding answers is greater: students work and learn from each other as well as from the teachers; and students use many resources, communicate with each other, and think most of the learning day. What better and more interesting learning can there be than when the student is challenged and motivated to be an active learner?

COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND DIFFERENT LITERACY PHILOSOPHIES

A major philosophical debate is now raging among literacy educators. As mentioned earlier, the proponents of direct instruction call for the teacher to be in command and ask that he or she guide the students through the scope and sequence of skills and strategies in the language arts (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967). Based on behavioral psychology, they subscribe to teaching specific, well-directed skills for most of their program. On the other hand, other literacy specialists feel the need for an open, authentic, holistic learning environment and oppose any type of direct instruction. Goodman (1992b) and others (Goodman & Goodman, 1982; Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1984; Smith, 1988) subscribed to current cognitive psychology and called for active student involvement in the learning process. They could not accept a passive learner guided by a preset of skills and strategies since they found such learning counterfeit and nonproductive. They preferred real-life, functional material and sought to encourage the curiosity and natural desires of the student to learn.

There is a middle-of-the-road group (Spiegel, 1992; Heymsfeld, 1989; Mosenthal, 1989; Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Famish, 1987) who adopted a combined approach. They felt that the best way to initiate learning is to start the student, regardless of level, by using authentic materials, as in a Whole Language class. However, if at any point the teacher assesses a functional problem. it is then suggested to use the necessary skills-approach material to assist in correcting and remedying the difficulties. Thus, when the need arises, basal materials can and should be used by the teacher to intervene and assist the learner. Here direct instruction complements Whole Language. These “eclectic” educators believe that when needed, the “hole” in Whole Language should be filled with direct instruction.

THE TEACHER AS MEDIATOR

If we accept the middle-of-the road approach to literacy learning and plan to use cooperative learning methods, we must remember not to place all of the responsibility of learning in the hands of the children. Teachers do not abdicate language instruction in a dynamic, cooperative class. Instead, the teacher’s role expands since he or she has to plan carefully, moderate wisely, record constantly for assessment purposes, and model and demonstrate intricate thinking learning patterns within the subject area. In this context, teachers mediate and use their instructional skills in focusing, directing, and guiding their pupils through the rough edges of understanding and of strategy construction while pupils are actively discovering the world of literacy. When things go wrong for learners, the teacher as mediator deals with the necessary strategies (the planning and monitoring elements in literacy) and skills (the knowledge and ability to perform isolated elements automatically) in literacy to remedy the problem. Skills are performed automatically, but strategies are a series of skills that are planned and organized based on a particular purpose. For example the skill of noting important details is used for understanding a story or for writing a summary, newspaper article, or other essay. It is an important skill, and no reader/writer or communicator can be without it. But knowing how to find the

details is not enough. Knowing how, when, where, and why to use a skill in concert with other skills in order to achieve successful communication is necessary.

Teachers must consciously train their pupils in these operations and not assume that they will automatically be discovered. Children must be given the opportunity of learning "how to mean" and how to express themselves. not only with the teacher's help, but also by themselves and with their peers. Some elements of language learning do not come easily to all students, and hence they have to be given models and explanations that tell them how to proceed with the learning. In many instances nothing is automatic. In the natural learning mode, students try to solve the problem by themselves or with the assistance of their peers; but that does not work all of the time. Students may require scaffolding while learning a new skill. and they may also need the teacher's guidance. Teaching metacomprehension monitoring strategies, along with a variety of remedial strategies to solve "misses" in information processing, is also a necessity.

Getting Ready

Collaborative group work is an ideal setting for peer scaffolding in literacy, but only when the group has been enlightened and taught how, when, where, and why to operate with various communication strategies. Students need literacy learning models and demonstrations. They also need instruction in the procedures of cooperative group operations.

Learning Environment

Teachers should consider the importance of a conducive learning environment. There is a need for planning and creating "activity centers" that offer interactions with the world of print, interactions with interesting and exciting reading materials, creative writing corners, and space to think, discuss, and listen. These learning stations provide pupils with a dynamic and exciting environment where they can talk and share together. For example, the provision of a small library of books, magazines, newspapers, and other authentic materials and the availability of a writing corner with trigger idea cards, lively bulletin boards, and other resources encourage and motivate appropriate behavior in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Working in a literate environment surely assists in giving students the literacy they need not only for daily, real-life situations, but also for academic learning.

VOCABULARY: ONE SECRET INGREDIENT IN LITERACY

Vocabulary is one of the main underpinnings in reading comprehension and in written production. A reader/writer devoid of vocabulary knowledge has severely handicapped receptive and expressive skills. Authentic real- life interactions build experiences, concepts, and vocabulary. Small learning groups provide the opportunity for vocabulary usage through the communicative exchanges facilitated by a group. When teachers are dealing with lexical items in the classroom, they should be aware of three major categories of basic vocabulary that require attention (Johnson & Pearson, 1984):

1. High-frequency sight words, a small group of words that occur in printed materials very frequently and are thought of as essential for early reading development

2. Selection-critical core words necessary for the comprehension of a specific reading selection
3. Known words with new meanings, multiple-meaning words, very common lexical items that have various meanings depending upon contextual surroundings

The vocabulary-building activities suggested here are concrete applications for teaching literacy in a cooperative mode. The activities have been divided into categories of behaviors good readers are likely to use. They should not be seen as a hierarchy of skills but rather as a classified cluster of ideas to assist in guiding, reinforcing, and remedying.

Each suggestion should be applied to cooperative learning structures in which the optimum of communication and social sharing can take place.

• Organize small groups by any number of methods and give each group a funny story with nonsense words placed properly. For example:
A long time ago there was a glippe. He was a sort of happy fellow who smiled and zllode with everyone. He would girk and fernal all of his dems. In fact he wiz so junvate at it that all of the sibnons said that he was really a ham at it.

Ask the children to discuss, in their cooperative groups, the meanings of the nonsense words. Tell them to rework the story by substituting real words for the nonsense words. The discussion that will take place will offer students a good opportunity to think out syntactical messages as well as semantic possibilities in the sentences.

As a follow-up activity, questions may be composed by the teacher or the children regarding the content of the story, both on a literal and an interpretive level. Examples might be: Who was. . . ? What was he or she doing? What did
think about him? Children can answer orally or in writing. They may also write their own stories, include nonsense words, and ask that the group "decode" the story.

• Have the pupils rewrite headlines, advertisements, poems, nursery rhymes, or make-believe television interviews. Tell children to replace real words with invented nonsense words. Ask other members of the group to guess the meaning and replace the nonsense words with real words. The children can then compare their words with the authentic text. The objective of this activity is to develop the awareness of vocabulary selection and to learn new words as well as new meanings for known words. It also provides the opportunity for context-clue drill.

• Students can discuss the various ways they use context clues. To assist them in their discussions, the teacher can prepare a "guide card" that notes some of the possible types of context clues:

a. Is there a definition in the same sentence or before or after?
b. What do you know about the topic?
c. Can you think of a word that sounds like this word?
d. Can you find a synonym for this word in the sentence or paragraph?
e. Is this word part of a familiar expression?

f. Has the word in question been used by the author as a summary of what was said before?

• Have students write two sentences using the same word but with a different meaning each time. The pupils may then share these sentences with the group and discuss the different meanings and usages of the words. For example: "I like to run." "She had a run in her stocking." "He will run for office."

• Use analogies as another technique for building vocabulary. Two pairs of students can challenge each other to find the most analogies within a specified time frame. Give the students examples of analogy thinking before they begin. Some examples:
Red is to fire engine as blue is to.
Funny is to clown as serious is to.

• Have the pupils, in pairs, work with antonyms and synonyms. Ask one student to build a list of words in one column and have the other find the antonym(s) and synonym(s) for each word. Prepare card-matching games by making card pairs, a word and its synonym or antonym. Groups of students can then play any number of card-matching games. Also ask the pupils to take written material from various magazines and newspapers and lyrics from popular songs and replace some of the words with their antonyms and/or synonyms.

• Focus on ambiguous meanings as they may appear in the children's reading or writing material. See how many ambiguous words and phrases the students can find. Prepare a "two-faced box" where students can place new words found to be ambiguous. Have the groups discuss and use these words to write sentences or short stories. Some examples are:

Held in a lock (wrestling); locked in jail.
Grown; grown wild; developed.
He was out; he was knocked out; he left; he never came in.
average, mediocre, plain, regular, standard.

• Help the pupils become aware of precise language and find the specific meaning in relation to an expressed idea. Ask them to polish each other's work by using more precise words, for example, refuse, garbage, waste. Have them discuss how a sentence changes its meaning when they use precise words. They may also select sentences from any reading material and share their feelings as to why the author specifically used a word or phrase.
Have the pupils enrich their writing by including figurative language using similes and metaphors. For example:

The mouse ran like a frightened cat.
He was as large as a house.
The ice cream was as cold as a block of ice.
She is as strong as an ox.

• Have children explain how strong an ox is or how a deer runs. What is so cute about a little baby girl? Ask the students to compose metaphors and similes and to explain their logic and figurative meaning. Have groups search for examples of figurative language in their reading material and then introduce a contest to see which group can find the most metaphors and/or similes within a week. Winners become "Metaphor/Simile Wizards."

• Have children work in pairs to create semantic, hot/cold word lists. In the beginning you may give the students lists of words that almost say the same thing and ask them to arrange them in progression from extreme to extreme, for example, boiling, very hot, hot, warm, lukewarm, cool, cold, freezing.

Although most of the suggested activities have an elementary school flavor, they can be used in a junior and even senior high school setting.

SELECTED LITERACY BEHAVIORS

Literacy educators recognize the need to build a classroom setting that encourages, stimulates, motivates, teaches, and advances development in reading comprehension. They also understand and accept the need for instructors to teach strategies and skills that will also aid the student in developing good behaviors and expertise using the expressive and receptive language arts (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992).

From the work of cognitive psychologists and reading comprehension researchers, a profile of the reading "expert," a model of the thoughtful, expert reader, has been developed (Dole, Duffy, Roehier, & Pearson, 1991). By studying the behavior of good readers, the researchers found that good readers

> • search and use what they know to build a bridge to the new information in the text;
> • synthesize and generalize the text information and their prior knowledge; predict outcomes and draw inferences before, during, and after they have read;
> • distinguish relevant from irrelevant information in the text;
> • monitor and control the successes and failures of their reading;
> • ask questions consciously and unconsciously regarding the material they read; and repair and remedy poor comprehension when they discover that they have erred.

It is these traits in particular that we would like to foster and encourage in our quest for literacy, and it is precisely the cooperative classroom that provides the necessary setting for their development.

Synthesizing and Generalizing

The identification and comprehension of textually important information, ideas that the author deems central to the text (Winograd & Bridge, 1986), are significant and important abilities that good readers exhibit. Cunningham and Moore (1986) noted the confusion in understanding the concept of main idea and suggested that teachers clearly explain what they mean by it and what kind of answer they expect from a main-idea or generalization question. Is it the gist, interpretation, key word, selective summary, theme,

title, topic, topic issue, or topic sentence they are looking for? All these elements can be relevant to a main idea and might require synthesizing or generalizing. Teachers must be explicit as to what kind of "main idea" they want the children to look for. The following are activities that deal with synthesizing and generalizing tasks:

- Have pairs of children match paragraphs with photographs, pictures, drawings, and sketches. Ask them to explain to each other how and why they matched a picture with a paragraph. Their rational and logical connections should also be explained. Students may differ in their answers or in their logic, but as long as there is credence to their thinking, you must encourage and accept their suggestions.
- Have one or more groups read the same passage and write down what they think the generalization or main idea is. The groups then compare and discuss their choices.
- Ask the children to prepare headlines for a newspaper using radio and television news broadcasts or events that have taken place at home, in school, or elsewhere. They can then expand the headlines and write subheadlines with additional information.
- Have the children in one group separate articles and headlines. Ask a different group to then match the articles with the headlines and/or subheadlines.
- Students may gloss a text or story with content generalizations next to each paragraph or group, of paragraphs. They prepare short marginal notes with information on vocabulary and background for the text. In this way other students with less background or those who function on a lower level may be able to read the original text with the assistance of the glossed notes.

Summarizing

Summarizing skills take into account the abilities that readers and writers have in determining relevant information, deleting redundant information, locating appropriate topic sentences, condensing that information, and presenting it in general terms. Summarizing is an excellent activity to help the learner focus on his or her learning, review the information, and assess general comprehension, as well as remember the material.

- Direct a pair or group to select various ideas or concepts and try to describe them in the fewest words. Other pairs or groups read or listen to the "product" and try to name the idea or concept.
- Ask students who draw well to summarize what has been read through pictures. Others who enjoy photography may capture the summary in photographs. Some can create collages or other visual art forms to represent summaries.
- Have the group play classification games. Provide them with lists of items from all of their areas of interest. They can even prepare their own lists and exchange them with other groups. For each group classified, pupils may suggest a broad title. Prepare or ask them to prepare a variety of sentences on one topic and then guide them in writing generalizations. The pupils can now work with their own content reading material. Allow them to work on their own only after you are

satisfied that they have understood what has to be done. Have members of each group check the products and the thinking behind them.

- Have groups prepare signs for stores, offices, and outdoor advertisements. Have them shorten the signs using fewer words, for example, We Sell Fresh Fish; We Sell Fish; Fresh Fish; Fish; Or, Offices of Doctor John E. Healthy; John E. Healthy, Doctor's Office; Dr. Healthy.
- Ask the children to write and send letters to their classmates. Later have them send telegrams with the same content.
- Small groups can read the same book or short story and prepare a "book-jacket" summary of the story. Prepare the children by having sample book jackets available for examples.
- Ask pupils to summarize the story line of simple fairy tales, such as Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, Robin Hood, and the Ugly Duckling. These stories may also be used for many activities suggested in practicing for generalization, main idea, and relevant details.

Drawing Conclusions and Predicting Outcomes

Drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes are tasks that can be practiced with almost every suggestion made until now. Asking riddles, playing detective, and finding the answer based on clues given that are explicit and/or implicit are all appropriate small-group activities.

- Suggest that children watch various television shows and ask them to prepare critiques that they will share with their group. Remind them that they have to try and justify their opinions.
- Have the pupils study pictures, drawings, and other visuals and, based on the contents, predict what will happen next and why. Additional activities can deal with what happened to the people before the picture was drawn or photographed. These questions can also be asked about films and television programs.
- Using any historical event or part of history, have the students discuss what would have happened if something else had happened differently. Suggest a small change and ask students to discuss, write, or draw their answers.

Relevant and Irrelevant Details

Determining the relevance of details in texts is one of the most important elements of good reading behavior. Knowing what is and is not important in a text helps in grasping the purpose of reading and in processing all aspects of comprehension. Learning how to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant details is a most important literacy behavior. The following are some suggested activities:

- Hand out pictures, photographs, drawings, and other visuals to the group. Have the groups determine criteria for what is and is not relevant for each item, such as color, content, or interpretation. Have the children justify why they have selected these details. It is important to stress the need for understanding the purpose of the activity done, since different purposes give us different relevant and irrelevant details. For example, if we want to study a building in the photograph,

information about the street may not be relevant. If we want to discuss color schemes, the type of concrete or the people on the street may not be relevant. This activity can also be done with various types and lengths of printed materials such as newspapers. advertisements, magazine material, and textbooks. Have children ask one another questions about the various details selected. The same group or another can try to find the answers from the pictures and/or written materials.

- Relevant details can also be reinforced while the children write creatively. Diaries, personal journals, and group-work journals, where the children record what has happened to them at home, in school, during a project, or during interaction in a group, are all good writing activities for this purpose. Discuss with them what should or should not go into a personal diary or journal. What is the purpose of writing a diary, and who is it addressed to?
- Letter writing is another way of dealing with decisions regarding relevant details. Groups decide to write to someone, but each student states a different purpose for writing. Establish with the children that style depends on the target reader. For example, a letter written to the president will require a different style than a letter to a close friend or a complete stranger. Children find out that different receivers of different written messages require different information and different details. They learn that relevancy is dependent on purpose.
- Determine relevance of details through lists of key words. Select or have the children, in pairs or small groups, select the concepts and vocabulary in a text that are essential for its content. Request the children to predict from the list what the text might be about (good for previewing). Then have them read the text and go back to the list to determine which of the words might help them in remembering relevant details.
- Have members of a small group select a story that they all liked. Have each member make a list of relevant events they think can be illustrated. Have them share and compare selected details. Perhaps some of the children would like to draw some of these details.
- Create "character lists" for describing story heroes. Do the same with background, descriptions of places, and descriptions of things. Suggest making extended lists of possible adjectives and adverbs that can add "color" to the characters, places, and things in a story.
- Have the group analyze the main character of a story and prepare a list of important details about him or her. Have the group members discuss his or her personality and then select music that fits this character. There may be some students who can compose a melody of their own for this task. Encourage your pupils to learn about the variety of music available. You may even reverse the process and have the children listen to music and then respond in any written way.
- Develop flowcharts, networks, and maps of character development, highlighting a story's important events and details.
- Role-play story personalities. Make a list of important details you wish to highlight and have students role-play the character as placed in different situations. How would he or she react if placed in another setting? What would happen if. .

Following Directions
Learning how to follow directions is a most important reading and study behavior, especially because many instructions for cooperative learning are often in writing. It sharpens focus and exactness and allows for better test results. Following instructions, of course, also gives the student a better product. Many students have the tendency to skim or never read the directions given and end up with incomplete work. Here are some suggestions on how to develop the ability to follow directions through collaboration.

- • Have the children play board games that require careful attention to instructions. Have them build a model plane or ship that requires following instructions carefully.
- • Have each child develop and write instructions for a game he or she would like to teach other children and then have them play the game based on these instructions.
- • Have one of the children describe how to bake a cake or cookies. Ask the group to carry out these instructions.
- • Ask student A to write down directions how to reach a part of the neighborhood unfamiliar to student B. After school A and B go out to find the place, with B doing all of the looking. A learns if he or she explained all of the directions correctly, and B learns if he or she followed the instructions properly.

The following activities are necessary to help learners function in a cooperative setting:

- • Hand out a sample set of instructions and ask the children to read and then explain what was asked of them in the instructions to check their understanding. Stress the need to read carefully all instructions before they begin and then to recheck at the end of the work if all of the instructions have been followed. Encourage them to underline and number each "instruction verb" in the activity so that they learn exactly what has to be done. Expose the children to the many possible types of instructions they will have to deal with. • Ask students to bring small machines, toys, and tools to class and have them explain how to work with the tool, toy, or machine. Other pupils should then attempt to use the tool or machine to show that they have grasped the instructions given.
- • Have the pupils. working in pairs. prepare maps of the school grounds. neighborhood, or even places from the stories or content textbooks they are reading. Various map keys for the legend can be planned and drawn to help the students discover and learn them.
- • One of the nicest ways to help develop confidence, self-image, and poise, as well as to train in following directions, is to have children learn how to do some magic tricks and then perform for the class and/or school. Have the children select some magic books from the library and set up a "magic club" where they can read, practice, and later perform what they have learned.
- • Many families have home video equipment. Teachers can put it to use with the help of parents by inviting parents to help on the planning, writing, and producing of short video programs. Using the world of photography and video in the cooperative class gives the students multiple ways of learning how to follow directions as well as real-life literacy experiences. Teachers can turn to photographic and video equipment companies for guidelines and suggestions.

Evaluating Fact or Opinion

- • Ask small groups to contribute questions regarding an important class or school issue. Make sure that the questionnaire includes both fact and opinion (What do you think about this'?) questions. Have each student answer the questionnaire and then discuss the various opinions revealed. In small groups, discuss the difference between fact and opinion.
- • Using different characters in a story, a historical event, or a television show, ask groups to analyze what these characters thought, what they did, and the opinions
- they had.
- • Have the students in a cooperative group record a news program from the radio and/or television. Have them discuss what is presented as fact and what may be
- opinion.
- • Compare a historical event to its fictionalized version in books, films, and/or television.

METACOGNITIVE BEHAVIOR—THINK-ALOUDS

Until recently think-alouds have been used as a method for discovering how one develops meaning. Today many language specialists agree that they may also be used for teaching readers and writers how to understand their world. Davey's work (1983) suggested that poor readers can improve their comprehension by learning how to make predictions, to draw on their prior knowledge, to visualize, to monitor their reading, and to self-correct errors. She noted that when teachers, while reading or writing, share and articulate their own thoughts with students, the students become aware of models and concrete examples they may use while reading or writing.

Tierney, Readence, and Dishner (1990) elaborated on Davey's think- aloud model. They suggested the following instructional steps for teacher modeling toward student empowerment:

1. Show students how to develop hypotheses:

    From this title I predict that
    In the next part I think that we will find out...
    This will happen next because...

2. Use analogies to pull out prior knowledge and show its application:

    It's almost like the time.
    I once had a pain in my leg like.

3. Describe your own visual images:

    In my mind he looks like...
    I can see the fire roar.
    That hat looked like the one I bought for my wife.
    He reminded me of that clown...

4. Monitor your understanding out loud. Modify it as you construct meaning and direct it toward total meaning.

    Is that what he meant?
    A ship? No, a small boat. No, a rowboat.
    I thought that it would be a. . . , but it was a. . . instead.

5. Modeling remedial strategies:

That word is not understood. I think I will read on.
I better look it up in the dictionary.
I missed his point; I better reread the paragraph.

These are some examples of think-alouds the teacher should share with the class before asking the students to use think-alouds themselves.

Working in small groups, the students can select from the modeling already done by the teacher and work toward grasping the technique. Students can read the same paragraph and think aloud, record on tape, write notes, and then compare their thinking with that of others. One student can read and think aloud, with the others reacting to and expanding his or her thoughts. This work can be done with any kind of text and is useful for building comprehension. One can and should expand the skill toward independent pupil practice. Davey (1983) suggested using a checklist with a value system to allow the student to benefit from this independent work. Tierney et al. (1990) mentioned the use of an index card or sheet of paper where the student lists the five steps noted in the think-aloud model —predictions, use of prior knowledge, visualizing, monitoring understanding, and modeling remedies—and evaluates the procedures with four grades: (1) all of the time, (2) much of the time, (3) a little, and (4) not very much. We highly recommend this procedure for reinforcement and review. The metacognitive behavior of think-alouds gives us the opportunity of looking into the window on our minds and allows those who look, talk, and listen to understand how to solve and construct good comprehension.

Group-work literacy activities can and should be introduced in almost every facet of schoolwork since we are always communicating while learning. This then gives credence and justification to the concept that every teacher and every student is a teacher/learner/participator in literacy growth. We learn and help others learn when we work together.

We have emphasized the need for students to become effective and efficient group participants. To this end, teachers have to demonstrate, model, and discuss all the activities in class. For enjoyable and productive interactions in all types of cooperative groups, pupils must first be shown how to do it to ensure successful collaborative work and good literacy behavior. It now remains the turn of the reader to implement and expand these suggestions.

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